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Committee on Information
Thirty-sixth session
28 April-9 May 2014
Consideration and adoption of the report of the Committee to the General Assembly at its sixty-ninth session

Draft report

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 34/182, the General Assembly decided to maintain the Committee to Review United Nations Public Information Policies and Activities, established by its resolution 33/115 C, which would be known as the Committee on Information, and to increase its membership from 41 to 66. In section I, paragraph 2, of resolution 34/182, the Assembly requested the Committee:

> "(a) To continue to examine United Nations public information policies and activities, in the light of the evolution of international relations, particularly during the past two decades, and of the imperatives of the establishment of the new international economic order and of a new world information and communication order;
>
> "(b) To evaluate and follow up the efforts made and the progress achieved by the United Nations system in the field of information and communications;
>
> "(c) To promote the establishment of a new, more just and more effective world information and communication order intended to strengthen peace and international understanding and based on the free circulation and wider and better balanced dissemination of information and to make recommendations thereon to the General Assembly"

and requested the Committee and the Secretary-General to report to it at its thirty-fifth session.

2. The General Assembly, from its thirty-sixth to sixty-seventh sessions, took note of the reports of the Committee and adopted consensus resolutions. At its sixty-eighth session, the Assembly took note of the report of the Committee and adopted consensus resolutions 86 A and B.

3. Currently, the Committee is composed of the following Member States:

Algeria	Benin
Angola	Brazil
Antigua and Barbuda	Bulgaria
Argentina	Burkina Faso
Armenia	Burundi
Austria	Cabo Verde
Azerbaijan	Chile
Bangladesh	China
Belarus	Colombia
Belgium	Congo
Belize	Costa Rica

Côte d'Ivoire
Croatia
Cuba
Cyprus
Czech Republic
Democratic People's Republic of Korea
Democratic Republic of the Congo
Denmark
Dominican Republic
Ecuador
Egypt
El Salvador
Ethiopia
Finland
France
Gabon
Georgia
Germa
Ghana
Greece
Guatemala
Guinea
Guyana
Hungary
Iceland
India
Indonesia
Iran (Islamic Republic of)
Ireland
Israel
Italy
Jamaica
Japan
Jordan
Kazakhstan
Kenya
Lebanon
Liberia
Libya
Luxembourg
Madagascar
Malta
Mexico
Monaco
Mongolia
Morocco
Mozambique
Nepal
Netherlands
Niger
Nigeria
Oman
Pakistan
Peru
Philippines
Poland
Portugal
Qatar
Republic of Korea
Republic of Moldova

Romania
Russian Federation
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
Saudi Arabia
Senegal
Sierra Leone
Singapore
Slovakia
Solomon Islands
Somalia
South Africa
Spain
Sri Lanka
Sudan
Suriname
Switzerland
Syrian Arab Republic
Thailand
Togo
Trinidad and Tobago
Tunisia
Turkey
Ukraine
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
United Republic of Tanzania
United States of America
Uruguay
Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)
Viet Nam
Yemen
Zambia
Zimbabwe

II. Organizational questions

A. Opening of the session

4. The organizational meeting of the thirty-sixth session of the Committee on Information was held on 28 April 2014 at United Nations Headquarters. The session was opened by the Chair of the Committee, Lyutha al-Mughairy (Oman).

B. Adoption of the agenda and programme of work

5. At its organizational meeting, on 28 April, the Committee adopted the following agenda and programme of work (A/AC.198/2014/1):

1. Opening of the session.
2. Adoption of the agenda and programme of work.
3. Admission of new members.
4. Statement by the Chair.

5. Statement by the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information.

6. General debate.

7. Consideration of reports submitted by the Secretary-General.

8. Open-ended working group of the Committee on Information.

9. Consideration and adoption of the report of the Committee to the General Assembly at its sixty-ninth session.

6. The Committee held its general debate on 28 and 29 April 2014. On 28 April, in the afternoon, the Department of Public Information, led by the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information, held an interactive dialogue with Member States.

7. For its consideration of agenda item 6, the Committee had before it the following documents:

(a) Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Department of Public Information: strategic communications services (A/AC.198/2014/2);

(b) Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Department of Public Information: news services (A/AC.198/2014/3);

(c) Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Department of Public Information: outreach and knowledge services (A/AC.198/2014/4);

(d) Proposed strategic framework for the period 2016-2017, Part two: biennial programme plan, Programme 24, Public information (A/69/6 (Prog. 24)).

C. Observers

8. Iraq and the Plurinational State of Bolivia took part in the session as observers. The Holy See; the State of Palestine; the European Union; the International Organization of the Francophonie; and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization also participated in the session as observers.

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Consideration and adoption of the report of the Committee to the General Assembly at its sixty-ninth session

Draft report

Chapter III
General debate

Rapporteur: Chibaula David **Silwamba** (Zambia)

1. Statements in the general debate were made by the following Member States: Argentina, Belarus, Brazil, Burkina Faso, China, the Congo, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, Egypt, Guatemala, India, Israel, Japan, Libya, Oman, Pakistan, the Russian Federation, Senegal, the Sudan, Spain, Ukraine, the United States of America, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) and Zambia. The meeting was also addressed by the following observers: the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (delivered by Costa Rica), the European Union, the Plurinational State of Bolivia (on behalf of the Group of 77 and China), the State of Palestine (statement distributed) and the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie.

2. The general debate was preceded by statements made by the Chair of the Committee. The Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information also made a statement and responded to questions and comments by Member States.

3. In taking up the substantive issues before the Committee, speakers emphasized the central role of the United Nations in global affairs and of the Department of Public Information as its public voice. One speaker, addressing the Committee on behalf of a large group, said the United Nations was the only universal forum for collective deliberation and decision on issues and concerns faced by the international community. The task of the Department in reaching out to a global audience with different backgrounds, worldviews and languages was therefore a challenging one. The group expressed its full support to the Department in its efforts to reach the widest possible audience through relevant technology and in a timely fashion. Another speaker, speaking on behalf of a large group, recognized the efforts

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of the Department in fostering a better understanding of the objectives and work of the United Nations on a wide variety of issues of high importance and interest for the international community.

4. Various speakers expressed strong support for the Department of Public Information and its leadership for being the "public voice" of the United Nations. Without such important work, one speaker said, the United Nations would not gain the essential support from the international community on the vast activities and efforts of the Organization. Another speaker expressed his Government's appreciation for the Department's efforts to develop and deepen understanding of the ideals and activities of the United Nations by engaging the diverse global community.

5. Several speakers extended their full support to the Department of Public Information for its work in promoting and advancing the work of the Organization through its continued campaigns on issues of importance to the international community, including the implementation of the internationally agreed development goals which included the elaboration of the post-2015 development framework, decolonization, peacekeeping, disarmament, human rights, sustainable development, poverty eradication, climate change and the priorities of the New Partnership for Africa's Development. Echoing this sentiment, another speaker identified the final push towards attainment of the Millennium Development Goals, the follow-up processes from Rio and the work on the adoption of a post-2015 agenda as some of the most important issues currently facing the world.

6. Much of the discussion focused on the role of multilingualism and the use of new communications platforms. While expressing appreciation for the growing use of the new information and communications technologies, one speaker, representing a large group, expressed concern that there remained deepening disparity in the use of the official United Nations languages on the Organization's website, despite the Department's efforts to improve multilingual content. The speaker reiterated the group's request that the Secretariat's content-providing offices translate all English-language materials and databases into all official languages and make them available on their respective language websites. The group also reiterated its call for the design and implementation of a strategy to deliver daily press releases in all six official languages through cost-neutral creative schemes and stressed that traditional media remained a primary means of communications in developing countries, where Internet coverage was sparse.

7. Another speaker, reflecting the views of a large group, emphasized that multilingualism was essential for communicating the Organization's actions to people all around the world. She expressed her group's satisfaction for the explicit support given by the Committee to the mainstreaming of multilingualism into the Secretariat's communication and information activities. She commended the Department of Public Information for its partnership arrangements on increasing the availability of multilingual content in a cost-neutral manner and for its continued efforts to enhance the accessibility of the United Nations website. Although she applauded the Department's efforts to expand live webcasting, she hoped that there would be further progress on fulfilling the group's request for access to video archives in all six official languages.

8. Referring to the request of the General Assembly that United Nations press releases be issued in all six official languages of the Organization, one speaker,

reflecting the views of a large group, reiterated the call for the Department of Public Information to design and implement a strategy, in close collaboration with other departments, to deliver daily press releases in all six official languages through creative schemes, in a cost-neutral manner. The speaker emphasized that the use of the phrase "creative schemes" in the current resolution was deliberate, as the group recognized that in times of zero real increases in budgets, the Department must find ways of doing more with static resources.

9. Another speaker, voicing the concern of her group about the strategy on press releases submitted by the Department, noted that such a strategy would lead to fewer meetings being covered. The group was particularly concerned that a number of important United Nations bodies would not receive any coverage in the proposed plan, in any language. Since, for some of those bodies, summary records were not available, press releases were the only way to ensure transparency, accountability and institutional memory.

10. One speaker, sharing his group's concern that the Department on its website was not consistently adhering to the principle of parity among the six official languages, reiterated that the Department's existing mandate demanded that it deliver press releases in all official languages. While welcoming the Department's intention to begin issuing press releases in Spanish by redistributing resources currently used for the English- and French-language versions, the speaker emphasized that a strategy was also needed for daily publication in all official languages. The Department's existing resources were detailed in a specific budgetary programme and it was not acceptable to favour one language over others, the speaker stressed.

11. Expressing similar views, another speaker, representing a large group, underlined that it believed financial and human resources provided to the Department should be equitably distributed among all official United Nations languages. The equitability criterion in the allocation of existing resources was of key importance, she noted.

12. Several speakers voiced strong support for the network of United Nations information centres, describing them as a vital source of information for local communities. A speaker, reflecting the views of a large group, expressed support for efforts to strengthen the network of centres, and welcomed the offer by some Member States to provide rent-free premises to host the centres. He stressed that such support should not be a substitute for the full allocation of financial resources for the information centres in the context of the programme budget of the United Nations. He also noted that any decision pertaining to reorganizing the centres must be made in close consultation with the host countries and take into account the geographical, linguistic and technological characteristics and needs of different regions. Another speaker, noting that United Nations information centres played a key role in the Department's work by bolstering the Organization's public image and distributing messages to local populations, called upon Member States to provide support, as needed, to help them fulfil their respective missions.

13. A number of speakers identified individual information centres, located in their respective capitals, and lauded their efforts to promote the work of the United Nations, often using local languages and working in partnership with local authorities. Referring to the work of the centre located in his capital, one speaker expressed his Government's resolve to continue supporting the centre by providing

rent-free premises and other facilities so as to enable it to continue to play its role effectively as the public face and voice of the United Nations.

14. Several speakers welcomed the growing importance of the United Nations Academic Impact as a global platform for universities and research organizations. One speaker noted that his country already had 19 Academic Impact members and the number could exceed 25 by the end of 2014. His country looked forward to supporting the initiative through informative student briefings that not only introduced the initiative's projects and activities to university students, but also encouraged new universities and academic institutions in his country to join Academic Impact. Another speaker, noting with satisfaction the progress made through partnership with the academic community, said in his country Academic Impact had pioneered a programme aimed at bringing children who dropped out of primary school back to mainstream education. Another speaker called Academic Impact a good example of how two-way interaction between the United Nations and civil society could be promoted. Another speaker declared his country would continue to support Academic Impact in whatever way was possible.

15. Several speakers applauded the Department of Public Information for its special information programme on the question of Palestine, including the training programme for Palestinian journalists. One speaker commended the Palestine, Decolonization and Human Rights Section of the Department for the annual International Media Seminars on Peace in the Middle East, as well as efforts to redesign the permanent exhibit on the question of Palestine at Headquarters. Recalling that 2014 was the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, he looked forward to upcoming activities in that context. One speaker asked the Department to reinforce its messages, including the need to end the occupation of Arab territories and to establish a Palestinian State. Taking a different position, one speaker expressed concern over the Department's special information programme on the question of Palestine, which targeted only one Member State. It was an example of the disproportionate attention the United Nations gave the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the speaker said.

16. The Chair of the Committee proposed the creation of a Group of Friends to continue to work with the Department of Public Information on effective, pragmatic and creative ways in which the issue of multilingualism could be addressed.

17. Responding to comments and queries made by Member States, the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information described the Department of Public Information as the repository of historic, as much as current, information, in trust for the Governments and the children, women and men of the world who could utilize it to advance what was the collective human cause. He noted that the current year's debate was a clear renewal of the commitment to promote and protect the collective human cause.